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AUTHOR Lowe, Dennis W.; And Others
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ABSTRACT

A project was initiated at one private, liberal arts college to respond to the substance use/abuse issues on campus. As a first step in designing the project, a study was conducted to assess the nature and extent of alcohol consumption and drug use by the students. Students (N=247) completed a 10-page questionnaire addressing topics such as consumption patterns, effects of drinking, change in drinking habits since entering college, student perceptions of their parents' attitudes toward their drinking, drug use, and problems associated with drug use. A minority of students reported using drugs, while a majority reported being consumers of alcohol. The results showed that students varied in their drug and alcohol use from abstainers to heavy users. They also differed in their reasons for using these substances, the contexts in which they use them, and the effects they experienced as a result of their use. It is recommended that the university consider various approaches to address diverse populations and to establish procedures designed to prevent substance abuse problems and provide assistance to those for whom alcohol/drug use is a problem. Nine steps completed in the university's Alcohol and Drug Project are listed, eight recommendations for similar efforts at other universities are suggested, and recommendations for efforts at the study university are appended. A 6-page reference list is included. (Author/NB)

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ALCOHOL AND DRUG USE OF COLLEGE STUDENTS: THE UNIVERSITY'S RESPONSE

Dennis W. Lowe
Nancy Magnusson Fagan
Ronald W. Fagan
John Free

Pepperdine University
Malibu, CA

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ABSTRACT

While much attention has been given to investigating and reporting the prevalence of drug and alcohol use/abuse in educational settings, less attention has been given to developing strategies which are designed to respond to substance use in these settings. This paper describes the steps taken to date by a university to address the alcohol and drug issues relevant to their students. An important step in this process is to conduct a survey to assess students' current use of these substances and related areas. The results of a survey completed by 247 students in a private, liberal arts college are provided in the paper. The implications of these findings are discussed and suggestions are given to other universities who may consider initiating a similar process on their campuses.

INTRODUCTION

Premise

The amount of attention given to the issue of alcohol and drug use/abuse in magazine, newspaper, and journal articles; television and radio news programs; and political speeches and literature suggests that it is a national concern. The prevalence of substance use and abuse in athletics, schools, and the workplace has been well documented. Now greater attention needs to be given to how educational and employment settings can respond to the alcohol and drug issues which are related to their organizations. The intent of this paper is to describe a project initiated in a private, liberal arts college to respond to the substance use/abuse issues on its campus.

Purpose of the Alcohol and Drug Project

1. To conduct a study designed to assess the nature and extent of alcohol consumption and drug-use by the students.

2. To share the results of the study and discuss their implications with key university administrators and student affairs personnel.

3. To stimulate discussions and make recommendations about how the university can respond more effectively to the substance use/abuse issues related to the campus.

METHOD OF THE STUDY

Procedures and Participants

A systematic sampling procedure was used to select one-sixth of the student population. A three-wave survey technique was used yielding 247 useable questionnaires which, when accounting for bad addresses, represented a response rate of approximately 65%.

Approximately 59% of the respondents were female and 41% were male. Almost one-third (31%) of the sample were freshmen, 17% were sophomores, 23% were juniors, 26% were seniors, and 3% were graduate students. While 79% of the respondents were U.S. citizens, 21% were international students. Chi-square analysis indicated that the sex, class standing, and citizenship percentages in the sample did not differ from the percentages in the general student population.

Instrument

A ten-page questionnaire was constructed to assess various alcohol and drug related issues of college students. Specific questions addressed topics ranging from consumption patterns and the effects of drinking to the change in their drinking since entering college and their perception of their parents' attitude toward their drinking. Questions were also asked about their drug use and any problematic consequences experienced as a result of its use.

RESULTS OF THE STUDY

Results for All Students

1. **Percentage who Drink.** Nearly 92% of the students indicated that they had consumed alcohol at some point in their lives and 89% reported having consumed alcohol within the two-year period preceding the study.

2. **Availability of Alcohol.** A majority of the students (52%) reported that alcoholic beverages are served more than one-half of the times when they get together socially with their friends.

3. **Knowledge About Alcohol.** 44% knew how long it takes to metabolize a drink, 60% knew the legal definition of intoxication in California, and 71% knew that coffee and cold showers are not effective as "sobering agents."

4. **Parents' Use of Alcohol.** 62% reported that one or more of their parents drank prior to the students' graduation from high school.

5. **Preference for Alcohol Treatment Programs.** Students indicated that they would prefer an off-campus treatment program if they ever needed to seek assistance for an alcohol problem.

6. **Students' Drug Use.** While marijuana and cocaine were the most commonly used drugs, 75% of the students indicated that they never use drugs and less than 7% reported any sort of problems associated with drug use. Less than 1/2% of the students reported heavy use of drugs, 5% reported moderate drug use, and 20% reported light drug use.

7. **Students' Views Toward Campus Alcohol and Drug Policies.** Although many students indicated an interest in more relaxed policies regarding alcohol use on campus, most students who expressed opinions about drug use felt that the university should undertake more efforts to discourage student drug use.

Results for Those Who Consumed Alcohol in Two-Year-Period Prior to Study

1. **Categories of Student Alcohol Consumption.** Based on "quantity-frequency" calculations of alcohol consumption, over one-half (55%) of the students were light users of alcohol, 5% indicated little or negligible use, 29% were moderate users, and 11% were heavy users of alcohol (i.e., an average of $\geq$ 1 oz. of absolute alcohol per day).

2. **Persons with Whom Students Drink.** Students primarily reported drinking with their friends (80% stated that they always or usually did so) or with dates (43%). 16% reported that they always or usually drink with their parents and very few (3%) indicated that they drink alone this often.

3. **Drinking Locations.** The most popular places to drink are at parties (67% stated they always or usually drink at parties) or bars (39%).

4. **Type and Frequency of Alcohol Consumed.** Almost one-third of the students (32%) drank beer at least one or two times per week while fewer drank wine (13%) or hard liquor (14%) this frequently.

5. **Reasons for Drinking.** As described in Table 1, the reason for drinking which was considered most important was to celebrate (94% indicated that this was a very important or fairly important reason for their drinking). Approximately one-half (52%) placed importance on using alcohol to help them relax. Nearly 44% stated that being polite in certain situations was an important factor in their reason for drinking. More than 1/3 (37%) indicated that the enjoyment of getting drunk was an important reason for their drinking.

6. **Effects of Alcohol.** Nearly one-half (48%) reported that they always or usually become friendly when they consume alcohol and 40% stated that they always or usually become talkative after drinking (see Table 2).

7. **Change in Drinking Since Entering College.** While 50% of the students indicated that their drinking behavior had not changed since entering college, 8% began drinking, 23% increased their drinking, and 18% decreased their drinking since beginning college.

8. **Students' Perceptions of Parents' Attitude Toward Their Drinking.** A majority of the students (62%) reported that their parents did not care if they drank while 23% indicated that their parents were opposed to their drinking. Only 6% stated that their parents were in favor of their drinking and 10% revealed that their parents were not aware that they drank.

9. **Demographic Factors in Alcohol Consumption.** Statistical tests revealed that male students drink a greater amount of alcohol than do female students. No differences in alcohol consumption were discovered based on citizenship (i.e., U.S. vs. international students) or membership in greek organizations (i.e. sorority/fraternity members vs. nonmembers).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

1. **Alcohol and Drug Use.** While a minority of students indicated that they use drugs, the majority reported that they are consumers of alcohol. Approximately 60% of the students who drink in this sample, however, are negligible or light consumers of alcohol.

2. **Social Context of Drinking.** The primary context in which drinking occurs is at social functions. Most students drink at parties, with their friends, to celebrate special occasions. Also, the primary effect of alcohol noted by the students is that they become more friendly.

3. **University's Response.** Students vary in their drug and alcohol use from abstainers to heavy users. They also differ in their reasons for using these substances, the contexts in which they use them, and the effects they experience as a result of their use. The university needs to consider, then, various approaches to address these diverse populations and to establish procedures designed to prevent substance abuse problems and to provide assistance to those for whom it is a problem.

TABLE 1

Importance Given to Various Reasons for Drinking

Reason	Percentage*
To celebrate	94
To relax	52
To be polite	44
The enjoyment of getting drunk	37
It gives me confidence	36
Because the people I know drink	36
To cheer me up	31
To relieve school pressures	21
For tension and nervousness	20
To forget my worries	19
To forget everything	17
When there's nothing else to do	10
It helps me think and work better	3

*Percentage of students who indicated this was a very important or fairly important reason for their drinking.

TABLE 2

Top Five Effects of Alcohol Reported

Effect	Percentage*
I get friendly	48
Makes me talkative	40
I get romantic or sexual	27
Makes me sleepy	24
Makes it hard to think straight	10

*Percentage of students who indicated that alcohol has this effect on them either always or usually.

STEPS COMPLETED IN THE ALCOHOL AND DRUG PROJECT

1. Faculty and Counseling Center staff members who were interested in campus drug and alcohol issues met to discuss how these issues might be addressed. The four faculty and staff members who initially met have continued to serve as the coordinating team for this project.

2. Since previous information about drug and alcohol-related issues pertaining to the students was primarily anecdotal, the coordinating team determined that a research study including various items related to students' drug and alcohol use was a necessary initial step.

3. Realizing the sensitive nature of this type of study, the coordinating team met with key university administrators to review the findings of drug and alcohol studies completed at other campuses and to propose that a similar study be conducted on this campus.

4. The Vice President for Student Affairs was approached about providing funding for the project since some of the offices which are his responsibility stood much to gain by such a project (e.g., health and counseling services, housing, campus life). This request was granted.

5. Every aspect of the research process was conducted with an awareness of the reluctance which students might have to revealing their drug and alcohol-use patterns. This sensitivity was expressed in the cover letter included with the survey as well as the follow-up materials. Efforts were made to complete procedures designed to provide a maximum response rate.

6. Once the data were collected and analyzed, precautions were taken to avoid releasing the results of the data until a report could be presented to the Vice President for Student Affairs and discussed with key university administrators.

7. The Vice President for Student Affairs distributed copies of the report to the university President and Provost. This was done not only to inform the top two university administrators of the study's findings, but also to obtain clearance for copies of the report to be submitted to the subcommittee of the university Board of Regents which is responsible for overseeing student policies.

8. Plans are being made to provide copies of the findings of this study and its implications to university personnel who work directly with students (e.g., housing, athletics, intramurals, campus life). Efforts will also be made to discuss the role that these staff members can play in responding to those alcohol and drug issues of which they become aware.

9. The coordinating team recommended that an "Alcohol and Drug Awareness Committee" be established to determine the goals, objectives, and environment the university wishes to create regarding drug and alcohol issues. In addition, this committee would consider strategies designed to improve drug and alcohol education, training, and resources on the campus (see Appendix A) as a follow-up to this project. The establishment of this committee and its membership is now being considered.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SIMILAR EFFORTS AT OTHER UNIVERSITIES

1. Involve university faculty and staff members who have an interest in alcohol and knowledge of research design.

2. Determine what information is already available and/or what research has been completed on drug and alcohol issues on your campus.

3. If a study is considered necessary, consider the primary motivation for the study and explore how and by whom the study's results will be used.

4. Contact key university administrators regarding the goals and purpose of the study and solicit their support as well as their possible involvement.

5. Consider obtaining financial support from an appropriate administrator for the project. This provides the project with not only financial backing, but also places it under the auspices of the university rather than something completed by independent researchers.

6. Throughout the process, demonstrate sensitivity to the political reactions or resistance to the project from faculty, administration, staff, university board, and students.

7. Seek input from various elements of the university who would represent differing views and interests for this type of study. These elements could range from those most interested in the emotional and physical well-being of the students (i.e. health and counseling center) to those involved in student discipline (i.e., Dean of Students Office) or with the image of the university (i.e., fund raisers).

8. Create and "Alcohol and Drug Awareness Committee" which would include representatives from the student body, administration, and faculty and staff. This committee could determine the goals and objectives the university wishes to accomplish regarding drug and alcohol issues which are consistent with its focus and mission. Then, this group could consider university policies and educational and training opportunities which would promote the goals and objectives which the university has set to accomplish.

Appendix A

RECOMMENDATIONS

Our primary recommendation is that the University establish an "Alcohol and Drug Awareness Committee." This committee could include representatives from the student body, administration, faculty and staff. The initial focus of this committee should be to determine the kinds of goals and objectives the university wishes to accomplish regarding the issue of drug and alcohol use. The committee can then examine the degree to which the intended goals and objectives are being met by current University policies, education and training opportunities, or other activities related to alcohol and drug use. Such a committee could function to encourage and promote alcohol and drug educational experiences and evaluate their effectiveness. Some of the other activities which such a committee might want to consider include:

1. Coordinate alcohol and drug abuse training for all personnel who work directly with students (e.g., housing staff, residential assistants, campus safety officers, counseling and health center staff, coaches).

2. Review the effectiveness of current University handbook policies and disciplinary measures on alcohol and drug misuse.

3. Examine the feasibility and possibility of integrating alcohol and drug information into freshmen orientation and the general curriculum. This could be aided by the preparation of alcohol education units and materials which could be integrated into the curriculum in selected disciplines.

4. Evaluate alcohol and drug awareness/education programs used on other campuses and their potential applicability to Pepperdine.

5. Contact off-campus programs to establish treatment options and referral networks for students with substance abuse problems as well as improving on-campus resources.

6. Develop a pro-active wellness approach toward alcohol and drug education for the entire university community and disseminate information through the University's wellness program.

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